

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina
COUNTY: Caswell
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON: Milton Historic District
AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Encompasses town limits of Milton (see description of boundaries)			
CITY OR TOWN: Milton		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Second The Hon. L. H. Fountain	
STATE North Carolina	CODE 37	COUNTY: Caswell	CODE 033

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Active town</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Comments			

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Various	STATE: North Carolina
STREET AND NUMBER:	
CITY OR TOWN: Milton	
STATE: North Carolina	
CODE: 37	COUNTY: Caswell

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Caswell County Courthouse	STATE: North Carolina
STREET AND NUMBER: Courthouse Square	
CITY OR TOWN: Yanceyville	
STATE: North Carolina	
CODE: 37	COUNTY: Caswell

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey (for Irwin House, Milton Church, Old Shops, Old Stores, Row houses)	FOR NPS USE ONLY
DATE OF SURVEY: 1940 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress	
STREET AND NUMBER: East Capitol and Independence Avenue	
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	
STATE: D. C.	

STATE: North Carolina
COUNTY: Caswell
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

2. Location

The Milton Historic District consists of the town of Milton, proper, as defined by the town limits:

North boundary is defined by the North Carolina-Virginia border and by the Country Line Creek.

East boundary is defined by Country Line Creek.

South boundary is defined by Country Line Creek and by a line drawn parallel with the northern boundary and extending to a point where it intersects with the western boundary (dotted lines indicate streets present in town plat which are now woodland).

West boundary is defined by a line drawn at a ninety degree angle to the north border and located between the Atlantic and Danville Railroad Station and the Dan River.

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Milton, a Piedmont village in Caswell County on the North Carolina-Virginia border, is sited on a hilly promontory encircled by the Dan River on the west and the Country Line Creek, which forks around the town on the remaining three sides and flows into the river. Milton, containing fewer than 100 structures, is composed predominately of nineteenth-century buildings forming a solid streetscape on Main Street and Academy-High Street and scattered loosely throughout the remainder of the original town. The architectural fabric consists predominantly of two-story domestic buildings punctuated by two-story commercial buildings and small-scale churches.

In 1826, the Reverend James M. Douglas, the Presbyterian minister, summarized the town's short history:

The ground on which the town of Milton now stands was covered with woods until about the year 1790. The first house was built by Mr. Daniel S. Farley, on the site of the present Milton Hotel. In 1796, a town, to be called Milton, a contraction of Mill-town, was laid out by Mr. Asa Thomas, and an act of the Legislature was obtained for the disposal of the lots.

In 1819, when there were thirteen houses only, the act of incorporation was amended, and the town enlarged. For a time, flushed on by the madness of speculation, it increased rapidly. . . .

Only one of the thirteen houses which composed the town in 1819 remains--the Union Tavern, known locally as the Yellow Tavern because of the supposed color of its bricks. The 1818 tavern, which abuts the sidewalk, is architecturally one of the finest of the few known early taverns existing in North Carolina. The three fanlighted facade entrances, with fragile metal sunbursts at the fanlight hubs, and the academic Doric cornice have a sophistication which is in distinct contrast to the trim of the simpler, more vernacular later nineteenth century structures in Milton.

The "madness of speculation" of Milton's antebellum boom period brought elegant Federal and Greek Revival residences to Milton's streets. These were built by speculators in Milton's economic future such as Henry M. Clay, owner of Clay's Mill and a land speculator who in 1820 built the imposing Federal house which faces west overlooking the Dan River at the corner of High and Main streets, one of the most dramatic settings in town. The neglected boxwoods of the rear formal garden which Clay planted now cascade over the high fieldstone garden retaining wall along Main Street forming one of the most picturesque features in Milton. The attenuated verticality of the unpainted house with its wide entrance fanlight, reeded Doric window pilasters, and delicate modillion cornice produces a memorable impression of faded Federal elegance. The house is known as the Irvine House, for Samuel Irvine, a tobacco merchant who owned it in the late nineteenth century.

The Winstead House, on the north side of Main Street beside Walton's Alley, is a two-story brick house with a gable roof. It exhibits Federal form and detail but heralds the emerging Greek Revival style in the bold simplicity and large scale of its execution. The entrances have fanlights, ovolo moldings enframe the openings, and raised-paneled corner blocks

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7. A

ornament the window sills. Behind the house is the brick kitchen and quarters with a steep gable roof punctuated by pedimented dormers. E. D. Winstead, a later owner of the house, was a very successful businessman who operated the largest tobacco factory in Milton in the late nineteenth century.

Most of the large planters in the area continued throughout the nineteenth century to occupy their plantation houses on rich holdings along the Dan River and Country Line and Hyco creeks while they speculated on Milton property. Milton functioned primarily as a market for their raw products, and the early fabric of the town is predominantly commercial, industrial, and small-scale domestic. The dominant Milton house-type of the antebellum period is the modest raised cottage, consisting of a brick story with an upper frame story containing the main entrance. Four examples of this type remain, all located on the east side of Bridge-Warehouse Street--the Wooding Place, the Oliver House, the Gordon House, and the house immediately north of the Baptist Church which perhaps was built as the parsonage. These dwellings, which appear to date between 1840 and 1860, contrast with the more pretentious Main Street residences, and probably represent the commercial class. John Wooding, believed to be the builder of the Wooding Place, operated the town brickyard, while Field Gordon, probable builder of the Gordon House, owned a saloon in Milton. Two of the raised cottages have hip roofs; two have gable ones. The architectural trim is simple, with large windows, plain eaves and Victorian porches of varying designs, several supported on masonry piers. The interiors exhibit center-hall plans and have plastered walls, simple trim, and typical large Classical Revival mantels.

The first church in Milton was not built until about 1825, twenty-nine years after the town's establishment. The Fragment Society, formed by the ladies of Milton, raised the necessary funds, built a church, and a Presbyterian congregation was formed. The second Presbyterian Church building, constructed in 1837, and the Baptist Church building, built in 1828 when the Baptist congregation was organized, are the oldest churches in Milton. Both buildings are substantial temple-form Greek Revival structures, but the contrast in interpretation of Greek Revival elements is striking.

The Baptist Meeting House, which sits on a terraced site on Warehouse Street, is a two-story brick building with a pedimented facade. The verticality of the block is accentuated by the fragility of the fretwork lintel ornament of the double facade entrances and the windows, reflecting Asher Benjamin's stylized classical patterns. The interior, essentially unchanged, features a baptismal niche enframed by a handsome wooden classical proscenium arch and a rear wooden balcony supported on Doric posts. The pulpit and pews resemble in design and plasticity the idiom of Tom Day and quite possibly were executed by him. In the finest community spirit, the church was erected by the citizens of Milton, who were called to the "church raising" by a notice in the Milton Gazette and Roanoke Advertiser, dated January, 1828:

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7. B

It is requested that those who hold subscriptions for building a Baptist Meeting House in Milton will report to the Commissioners in his place the amount subscribed of or before the first Thursday in March next at which time and place all those who may wish to encourage and aid in the said building are requested to attend, especially those who are to furnish labour and materials.

(Milton Gazette and Roanoke Advertiser, Vol. VL, No. 44, Feb. 28, 1828).

The Milton Presbyterian Church is a robust one-story temple-form structure of red brick with tetrastyle Doric portico featuring heavy stuccoed brick columns and a small louvered cupola. According to local tradition, the graceful church pews of walnut, yellow poplar, and pine, with beautifully curved arms, were made by Tom Day, who with his wife, Aquilla, became a member in 1841. The pews are supposedly the result of a bargain struck between Day and the church elders, who gave him and his wife permission to sit with the main congregation instead of in the slave balcony in exchange for their manufacture.

Only a few monuments to Milton's antebellum commercial prosperity remain standing. One of these, the pre-Civil War two-story brick grocery and dry goods store of Samuel Watkins (now the E. D. Thomas grocery), was altered following a twentieth century fire. The other two, the Union Tavern and the Milton State Bank Building, have both become private residences. The Milton State Bank, a branch bank built between 1859 and 1863 by the Bank of the State of North Carolina on the eve of its Civil War bankruptcy, is a fine example in North Carolina of the long-delayed architectural transition in the south from the Greek Revival style to more exotic Victorian styles. The two-story brick Greek Revival structure has Victorian Italianate and Gothic Revival accents.

The present business district of Milton consists of a block of seven brick Victorian row stores built in the 1880s which form one of the best preserved late nineteenth century commercial districts in North Carolina. The two stores on the western end are one-story and the five easternmost buildings form a cohesive group, each two stories high, with segmental-arched windows at the upper level. Each storefront, containing a central entrance with flanking display windows and a side entrance to the upper story, is distinguished by a different combination of playful Victorian wooden ornament consisting of paneled, boxed, and chamfered pilasters, diagonally sheathed dados, and bracketted cornices. Each upper cornice is accentuated by a different brick corbel course design. Most of the stores have shed facade porches supported on plain bracketted posts which form a nearly continuous pedestrian covered walkway. The easternmost building served as the movie house, while the other stores contain small retail establishments.

By 1857 Milton had five tobacco factories. No fewer than thirteen tobacco warehouses, prize houses where the raw tobacco was packed into hogheads,

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	North Carolina	
COUNTY	Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE

(Number all entries)

7. C

and tobacco plug and smoking factories appear on the 1893 Sanborn Insurance Map. By 1925 not one remained in business and most of the buildings had disappeared. Claude Allen's Plug Tobacco Factory on the east side of Bridge-Warehouse Street is the only existing factory building. The factory is a late nineteenth century vernacular Victorian one-story frame structure now used as a barn. Across the gable-end facade is a loading dock with a shed roof, and along the south side of the building is a lean-to storage shed. The only exterior ornament is the small, decorative louvered ventilator window in the upper facade. The interior is a large, unpartitioned space with machinery, work tables, plug molds and packing crates scattered about. The factory office, a miniature version of the factory, stands in the side yard.

Milton's cotton mill, foundry, and other industrial buildings have also disappeared, and only the fieldstone and brick foundation ruins which surround Milton bear evidence of its once having been a manufacturing center. The tall granite piers of the bridge which carried the Milton and Sutherlin Narrow Gauge Railroad over Country Line Creek are the only physical evidence of Milton's first railroad link, which operated from 1878 to 1896. In 1896 the Atlantic and Danville Railroad Company line parallel with the Dan River superseded the narrow-gauge railroad, and its long-abandoned board-and-batten railroad station with its loading platform still stands at the foot of Main Street.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture  | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce     | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Gradual economic arrest has left Milton, once a thriving antebellum tobacco town, almost a ghost town. A remarkable collection of buildings--including the sophisticated Federal tavern, the straightforward Greek Revival churches and residences, the imaginative Victorian bank, the commercial row, and modest vernacular cottages--survives, faded but essentially unaltered.

In 1796 the General Assembly of North Carolina passed "An Act to establish a town and inspection of tobacco and flour in Caswell County, near the mouth of Country-line creek, on the land of Asa Thomas." The town, formed from thirty acres of land located near Thomas' grist mill, was accordingly to be known as Milton after the mill. The act appointed five commissioners to lay off the land in half-acre lots and sell them at public auction. The same act directed that a "good and sufficient house or houses" be built for tobacco and flour storage, and that two inspectors be appointed annually by the Caswell County court to operate the inspection station. The warehouse inspection system had been established in North Carolina in 1754 to control tobacco quality. Since Virginia siphoned much of the tobacco produced in the North Carolina border counties into her markets, one of the primary reasons for the establishment of Milton was to build a rival trading town in this area to combat the loss of trade and revenue.

Evidently some settlement had occurred by 1796, but the town grew slowly in this early period. In 1810, Bartlet Yancey, a prominent Caswell County statesman and Milton property owner, described the town as containing ". . . 2 stores, a Saddler's Shop, a Hatter's Shop, a tavern with 15 or 20 houses. . . ." The Dan River, which bordered Milton on the west, was the town's main transportation artery. The Roanoke Navigation Company, chartered in 1812, which operated flat-bottomed bateaux between Madison through Danville and Milton to the Albemarle Sound by way of the Dan River which flowed into the Roanoke River and into the sound, was one of the causes of the economic expansion in Milton.

Milton evidently outgrew its boundaries, for an 1818 legislature authorized the extension of the town limits and directed the town to draw up a town plan representing the streets and alleys and the numbered lots. During this antebellum expansion, the town acquired the necessary financial and civic institutions. Paschal's History of Printing says that a newspaper (name unknown) was published in Milton in 1812. In 1819 the Milton Intelligencer began publication. In 1820 the Bank of New Bern, one of the

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	North Carolina	
COUNTY	Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE

(Number all entries)

8. A

two earliest private banks in the state, established an agency on Main Street. In 1834 an agency of the State Bank of North Carolina was set up, and by 1850 Milton contained a savings and loan institution as well. Two church congregations were formed, a Presbyterian one in 1826 and a Baptist one in 1828. The Milton Female Academy was founded in 1820, and Milton Male Academy in 1847.

Milton became the business and social center of the large plantations on the fertile bottom land along the Dan River and Country Line Creek, with horse races and fancy balls being two of the main attractions. The Milton Racetrack, which operated during the antebellum period, drew aristocratic spectators from Virginia and North Carolina. By the mid-century, Milton's commercial and cultural assets included the Milton Hotel, several taverns, groceries and dry goods stores, drug stores, doctors' and lawyers' offices, a savings and loan institution in addition to the banks, a dance studio, and a candy store. The variety of items advertised by local merchants in the newspaper indicates that the buying potential of the citizens was substantial.

The town also supported a small colony of craftsmen. By 1850 twelve cabinetmakers were working in Milton. The most famous of these was Tom Day, perhaps the best known nineteenth century North Carolina cabinetmaker, who spent his working career in Milton from about 1820 to 1859, and filled the town with examples of his craft. After 1848 his residence and cabinet shop were in the Union Tavern building. By the mid-nineteenth century his workshop had the largest production and greatest number of apprentices in the state. His distinctive large-scale Empire furniture, enlivened by sinuous curves and unusually three-dimensional classical ornament, was in demand in both North Carolina and Virginia. Interior architectural trim such as mantels and newel posts exhibiting his characteristic exuberant geometric and curvilinear patterns appear in several Milton residences, among them the Winstead House on Main Street, as well as in the finer farmhouses of the mid-century in Caswell County.

Antebellum Milton sustained a diversity of manufacturing interests. The "Milton Factory," the first cotton mill in the area, which manufactured "kerseys" and "sattinetts," coarse cloth, was operating in Milton by 1846. A foundry and plow manufactory, which also made mill castings, was in business in Milton by this date.

However, Milton's economy was primarily one of tobacco. Milton warehouse owners were "upland dealers" who "prized" the tobacco in hogsheads and sent the leaf for resale to larger markets in Virginia. By 1850 Milton was a small but active market with four tobacco factories, and exported \$25,000 to \$30,000 worth of freightage annually, consisting of tobacco, wheat, flour, corn, oats and cotton yarns. The town was proud of its economic progress, and C. N. B. Evans, the outspoken editor of the Milton Chronicle, asserted in an 1850 editorial Milton's economic superiority to Danville, her closest rival. Evans admitted that Danville with ten tobacco factories exported more tobacco than Milton, but



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

8. B

. . . Milton doubled her in exportation of wheat, flour, corn, oats and cotton yarns. . . . Why, the nearest Factory to Danville is the one in Milton--unsurpassed in the South for its splendor and magnificent operations, and we do not doubt but that this Factory sells more cotton yarns in 2 weeks than Danville sells in a whole year! Because here the article is manufactured--here it is not only sold at retail but wholesale--hundreds of bales are almost daily ordered . . . from Petersburg, Farmville, Lynchburg. . . .

An announcement in the Chronicle in 1857 signalled the beginning of a revolution in tobacco cultivation which would profoundly affect Caswell County:

. . . Capt. A. Slade, of Caswell, N. C., and his two brothers, have sold their entire crops of Tobacco, lugs included, to a Lynchburg manufacturer for the extraordinary price of \$35 per 100 lbs. . . . (Milton Chronicle, February 12, 1857)

This Caswell County farmer's perfection of the charcoal curing process which cured tobacco leaves to a golden yellow resulted in a revitalization of the tobacco industry, and Milton strove to capitalize on the bright-tobacco boom which by the 1880s had shifted the center of the tobacco industry into North Carolina. But Milton was an economic failure. The town failed during the mid-nineteenth century in its competition with Danville to the west to become an industrial center, and following the Civil War it was overpowered by the spectacular growth of Durham to the south as a tobacco market. In both cases this occurred primarily because the town was bypassed by the railroad during the crucial years of industrialization. Milton had tried to secure a line since the late 1840s, but because of her border location and rivalry between North Carolina and Virginia, the town did not have a railroad until 1877, when she built one herself. The town shrank from over 1,200 people on the eve of the Civil War to a village of 235 in 1970. The social and cultural impact of Milton, however, will always be felt through the legacy of her prominent families, with names such as Meriweather, Irvine, Donohue, Fleming, and Hunt; through her role in the nineteenth century as a training ground for craftsmen; and, most of all, through the accidental preservation of the physical context in which her past occurred which has so enriched the present.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

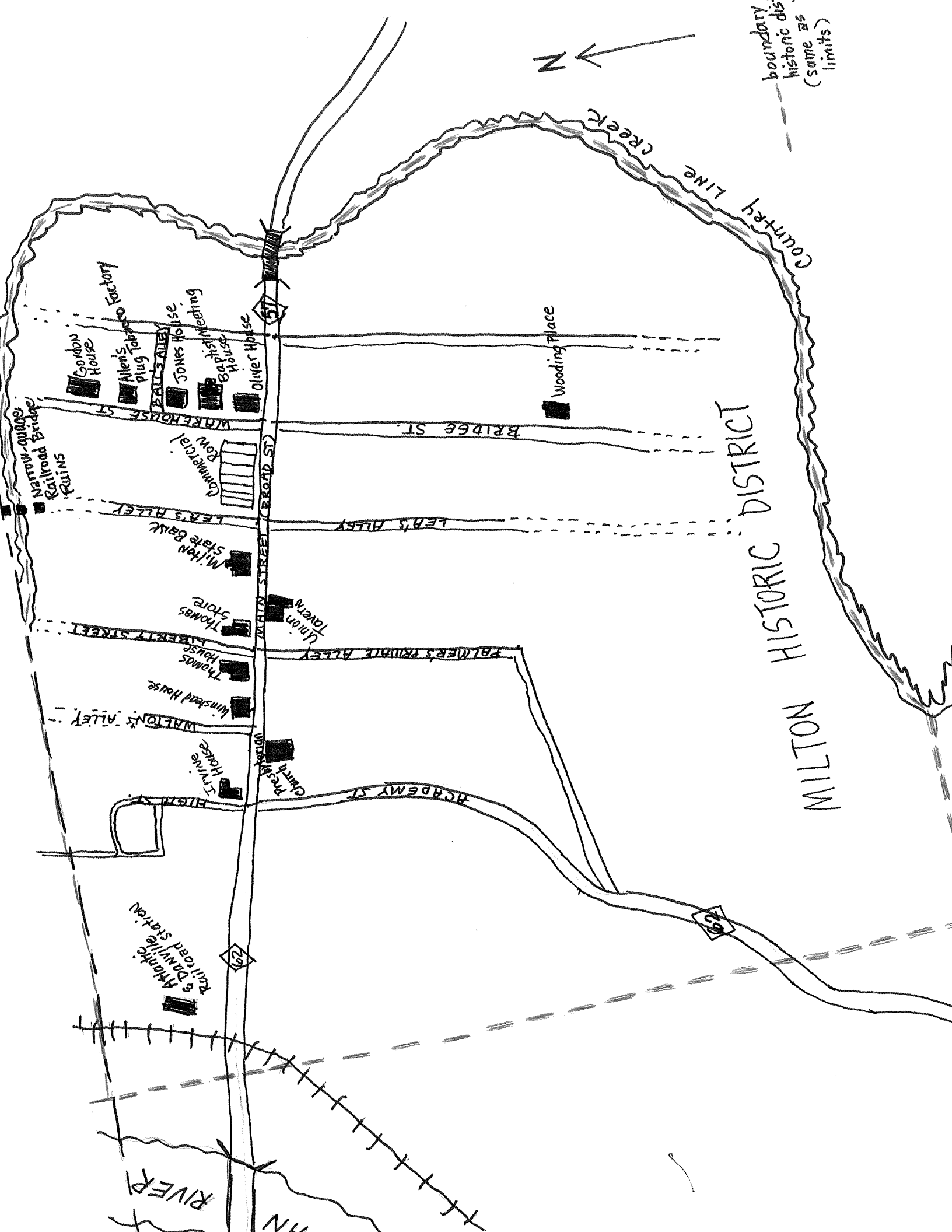
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Caswell	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

9.

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boundary historic dis (same as limits)



MILTON HISTORIC DISTRICT

- Gordon House
- Allen's plug tobacco Factory
- JONES HOUSE
- BAPTIST Meeting House
- Oliver House
- Commercial Row
- Milton State Bank
- Thomas Store
- Thomas House
- Winslow House
- Walton's Alley
- Trine House
- Arling St

MAIN STREET (ROAD ST)

- Wooding Place
- BRIDGE ST.
- LEA'S ALLEY
- PALMER'S BRIDGE ALLEY
- ACADEMY ST

Narrow-gauge Railroad Bridge

RIVER

County Line Creek

Arling St  
Milton State Bank  
Thomas Store  
Thomas House  
Winslow House  
Walton's Alley  
Trine House

